

PM urges private sector, as engine of growth, to

Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

All must care for en

strengthen commitment

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By K.P. Waran

PETALING JAYA, Mon. — The public and private sectors as well as the rest of society must contribute towards caring for the environment, including the wetlands. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the task involved the entire spectrum of society and called for the commitment of all to sustain the environment.

He said given the increasingly important role which the private sector played as the engine of growth, the private sector must strengthen its commitment to care for the environment.

He said as usual, people at large, were the biggest destroyers and polluters and only they were in a position to protect their environment, particularly the wetlands.

He said too often the responsibility was left to the Government but no Government could fight against the continuous and massive pollution that people perpetuated whether deliberately or through circumstances.

"Of course, when people are poor, the pollution is more extensive. Unable to pay for waste disposal or to dispose of it with care for the environment, they just throw their waste around them. The result is pollution and destruction.

the environment more than poverty. Huge forests have been totally decimated because the only fuel the poor can afford is wood. The small environmental sacrifice which has to be made in order to develop is far less than the damage due to unmitigated poverty," he added.

He said it had been acknowledged that wetlands played a critical role in supporting the lives of millions of people throughout the world providing a wide range of valuable products to society including fish, fodder and timber and also performed a number of natural biophysical functions such as flow regulation and groundwater recharge.

"They are, therefore, relevant for research and understanding to ensure that their contributions to the development of the ecosystems are maintained. Today, these life-sustaining systems remain under threat.

"Many wetlands especially in the North have been destroyed or degraded through over-exploitation or environmentally unsound development," he said.

He said Malaysia has more than three million hectares of wetlands covering nearly 10 per cent of its land area with the main wetlands being lakes, swamp forests, swamps,

"Poverty is, therefore, the biggest cause of pollution and they, who impoverish people, are directly guilty of polluting," he said when opening the international conference on wetlands and development in Subang.

The five-day conference is jointly organised by the Asian Wetlands Bureau, the International Waterfowl and Wetland Research Bureau and the Wetlands for Americas in conjunction with the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry, the Selangor State Government and IAS. The *New Straits Times* has been appointed the official newspaper.

He said local non-governmental organisations could also play a proactive role in the conservation of the environment and urged them to be highly professional and focus on real issues affecting society and to understand the balance that must be reached between development and environment.

"NGOs must accept the fact that nothing damages

shallow coastal waters and coral reefs.

He said many of these areas were critical for production of fish, timber and other forest products, for water supply, flood mitigation and also recreation, adding that estimates showed that Malaysian wetlands contributed more than US\$2 billion (RM5 billion) to the economy every year directly or indirectly.

He said scientists from around the world had come to study wetland habitats and species in Malaysia and since strategic research was an important prerequisite for sustainable resource management, it was encouraging that several Malaysian scientists had become leading experts in these fields.

He said many developing countries including Malaysia were prepared and committed to their part to adopt eco-friendly development process for the good of all but would not be held hos-

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All must share in preserving wetlands, says PM

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tage by countries bent on retarding their development process.

Stressing that the onus of change towards sustainable development must be borne equitably by all nations, he said, developing countries had made earnest commitments during the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit three years ago to participate in what was to be a new global effort to save the planet from environmental damage.

He said they were encouraged by the expectation of assistance by way of additional and new financial resources and technology transfer from developed countries which, however, had not been forthcoming.

"Developed countries see in the concern for environmental protection only opportunities to sell the technology that they have developed for profit."

He said he had come to understand that during the two-day deliberations, the conference had agreed in principle to establish a new global organisation to sustain and restore wetlands and their resources worldwide.

"As you create a new global organisation, I hope you will bear in mind the need of the developing countries to develop, and that the preservation of the wetlands must be equitably shared between the rich and the poor," he said.